



Al-Risala 1992

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Indian Muslims in the Post–Independence Era

The first edition of a 390-page book, entitled *Passive Voices* by K.L. Gauba of Bombay, on the state of Indian Muslims after independence, was published in 1975. In explanation of the title, the author had this to say: “It would be difficult to sum up the status and conditions of Muslims in India better than in the two words: “Passive Voices”. When our Muslims leaders see communal riots taking place in the country; Urdu, the language of Muslims being replaced by other languages; the ratio of Muslims in government extremely low; Muslims facing such situations as they call prejudice; they are quick to pronounce that Muslim are forced to lead a passive life.

Personally, I do not agree with this analysis, although, given a set of circumstances in which the Muslims are in a minority in this country and the other party in the majority, this is what might have been expected. Prior to independence, the situation was very different because a balance had been struck between the two communities by the ruling foreign power. In consequence, the Muslims – at least in practice – did not feel that there was that kind of disparity which exists at present. But then, once the foreign power had left the country, it was but natural that this balance would be upset. Now realism demands that we accept what is but natural, instead of complaining about it.

The matter does not end there; however, one of the eternal laws governing this world is that “every end has its beginning and every beginning its end.” This law of nature tells us that no condition is eternal. Every condition has to change and develop with the passage of time. This is why I see no justification for these ‘complaint and protest’ campaigns launched by our Muslims leaders in the post-independence era. To my way of thinking, Muslims ought to go in quest of a new beginning to their end. They must ferret out its secret. But there is little chance that Muslim leaders will ever free themselves from their self-appointed roles. Even so, I have my eyes set on the window of the future, which is always wide open to the entire community. It never remains closed to anyone.

To illustrate my point, I should like to present an example from the book, *A Study of History*, by the well-known British historian, Arnold Toynbee, published, in 12 volumes. This work presents an in-depth study of 21 known civilizations of the world. Toynbee’s conclusions, it will be found, relate, directly to the conditions of the present-day Muslims.

According to Toynbee, this study reveals the fact that the major civilizations of the world were built up by certain minorities who had their latent potential awakened by challenges from the external world. Ultimately, it was their creative response to adversity which ushered in a new age, not only for these minorities, but for humanity as a whole.

Here, I shall present two examples of such a response to external challenges. The first concerns the Muslims themselves. In ancient Arabia, their acceptance of Islam and their attempts to indoctrinate

others led to their being plunged into conditions of such adversity that, in many cases, they even had to abandon their hearths and homes. But they were undaunted, and it was their creative response to this situation which enabled them to give the first impetus to a new era in human history. An American encyclopedia chronicles the coming of Islam in these terms: "Its advent changed the course of human history."

The second example pertains to the European nations, who suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Muslims after the 200-year long confrontation of the crusades. This did not, however, prove to be the end for them, for out of this apparently total debacle, there emerged a new beginning. Again, it was the creative response which they gave to this challenge, which produced the form of western civilization which has since dominated the world.

Muslims in this country may be in the minority, but it is a very large minority, next in numbers to the majority. As such, it necessarily faces severe challenges. Muslim leaders see this situation as being fraught with prejudice and injustice, but I see in it the workings of nature. Whatever has to happen is happening. No other alternative should be expected.

However, in this state of affairs lies hidden a tremendous hope – that this challenge will certainly awaken the Muslims' latent potential. The challenge mechanisms will of itself enable them to offer a creative response to the situation. And once this happens, events will take the same course as in their previous history. While Toynbee puts the matter sequentially, within a historical framework, the Qur'an gives us the essence of this development. "Many a small band has, by God's grace, overcome a large band." (2:249).

I shall sum this up by referring to a letter by Swami Vivekananda published in his book, *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*. In his letter No. 175, he writes:

... I am extremely happy to learn that the Lord is silently preparing wonderful things for our motherland ... the truth is that Advaitism is the last word in religion and thought and the only position from which one can look upon all religions and sects with love ...

While speaking of Advaitism as the religion of love, Swami Vivekananda writes: 'Yet practical Advaitism, which looks upon and behaves to all mankind as one's own soul, was never developed among the Hindus. On the other hand, my experience is that if ever any religion approached to this equality in an appreciable manner, it is Islam and Islam alone. Swami Vivekananda rounds off his letter with these words" 'For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems – Hinduism and Islam – Vedanta brain and Islam body – is the only hope. I see in my mind's eye the future, perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible with Vedanta Brain and Islam Body. (pp. 379-80)

But there would appear to be a major obstacle to the realization of Swami Vivekananda's dream. It is simply that for the last few years Hindu communalism has gone to such extremes that Hindus are becoming further and further distanced from the minority. Yet, if you delve deeper, you will find that

there is a plus point hidden in this minus point. It is a distinct possibility that when a situation has run its full course, it will begin to take a reverse course. That is a law of nature. Revenge's finale, after all, is contrition. So that we may expect that when this communal frenzy has reached its final limit, it will take the reverse course, in consonance with the law of nature. And then Hindus and Muslims who, in the words of Mr. K.R. Malkani, are blood brothers' will meet one another like real brothers. Then, together, they will build a new future, not only for themselves, but for the entire country.

I see the present situation as a state of transition. At this point in time, the majority is heading towards an outer extreme, but only so that it may return to its initial state. Side by side with this, the pressure of circumstances is moulding Muslims into a group – albeit in the minority – which is creative in outlook.

By the grace of God, both processes will, in the near future, reach their completion, and then both communities will join together to build that new and better India which was envisioned by Swami Vivekananda almost a century ago, in 1898.

In Giving We Receive

According to *Time Magazine* of October 17, 1986, “Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had long voiced a desire to visit the People’s Republic of China. But as long as Britain ruled a piece of Chinese territory, the crown colony of Hong Kong, such a journey was impossible. The 1984 Sino-British agreement returning Hong Kong to China in 1997 provided the price of admission” (22).

Returning Hong Kong to the mainland was no easy task, for it amounted to losing a jewel from the British Crown, but it was clear that the British Monarch’s desire to visit China was not unconnected with Britain’s avidity for trade with that country and, obviously, the ensuing gains would be immense. Relations between Britain and China had been uneasy over the last hundred years, but with the Queen’s historic visit – the first ever made to China by a member of a British Royal family – the gates to trade were thrown open. A Successful piece of diplomacy, it paved the way to an annual trade agreement of, over one and a half billion dollars.

A jewel may have been lost from the crown, but the subsequent benefits will be enormous. Clearly, we have to give in order to take. That is the way of the world.

Child Education

Every child is born upright in nature. The Qur'an has this to say on "the upright nature with which Allah has endowed man. Allah's creation cannot be changed. This is surely the true religion, although most men do not know it." (30:30)

The essence of this verse is that every child born into this world is, from the moment of his or her creation, endowed with the consciousness of human values. What is right, what is wrong, the do's and the don't's are all already instilled in his or her psyche.

According to Abu Hurayrah, the Prophet (upon him be peace) said: Each newborn is upright in nature. It is the parents who make him a Jew, a Christian or a Zoroastrian (Bukhari, *Sahih*, Kitab Al-Tafsir, Chapter: Rome)

This *hadith* shows that moral deviation in most cases is the result of a vitiated atmosphere, and not the result of some fault of creation. Parents (or the immediate environment) play an important part in the formation of the human personality. If immediate environment is right, the growth of the child will be right. If the immediate environment is wrong, it will have an adverse effect on the child's growth.

According to Al-Tirmizi, the Prophet said: "The best gift that a father can give to his child is to teach him good manners." (*Mishkat Al-Masabih*, 3/1389).

This hadith throws light on the first and most important responsibility that falls on guardians towards the child: that is moral training, how to lead one's life in this world. How to treat people. The prerequisites for becoming a good citizen: The child has to be prepared accordingly, keeping all this in view. The guardians or parents are the first people upon whom this responsibility devolves.

At the battle of Badr which took place during the life of the Prophet, seventy members of the enemy were taken prisoners, a number of whom were literate. It is worth remembering that the ransom set for their release by the Prophet was that each of them should teach ten Medinan children how to read and write. It is as if the first school set up by the Prophet of Islam had enemies and idolaters as its teachers. (Ibn Kathir, *Seerah*, 512/2).

This makes it very clear that Islam attaches such great importance to the education of children that great risks may be taken towards this end. We should not hesitate, therefore, to avail of any opportunity for education, even when the teachers are all non-Muslims, or enemies for that matter.

One example of the manner in which children should be educated is given in the Qur'an in chapter 31. Luqman was pious, truthful man. He said to his son when admonishing him: "My son, associate none with Allah, for to associate others with Him is a tremendous wrong." (31:13). "My son, Allah will bring

all things to light, be they as small as a grain of mustard seed, be they hidden inside a rock or in heaven or earth." (31:16) "Allah is Knowing; Aware." (31:34) "My son, be steadfast in prayer, enjoin justice, that is a duty incumbent on all. Do not turn away from men with scorn, nor, walk proudly on the earth: Allah does not love the arrogant and the vainglorious. Rather let your gait be modest and your voice low: The harshest of voices is the braying of the asses." (31:17-19).

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When knowledge is reduced to an avenue towards personal prestige

Ubayy ibn Ka'ab said: "Acquire knowledge, and practice it. Do not acquire it in order to beautify yourselves thereby, for there will come a time when learning will be used as an adornment, as people adorn themselves with clothes."

One who lies is a hypocrite

The Prophet was asked whether a coward could be a believer, and he said yes. Then he was asked whether a miser could be a believer, and he said yes. When asked if a liar could be a believer, he said no. Khuzaiifa ibn'ul-Yaman remarked that in the time of the Prophet, one used to be counted as a hypocrite when one lied. "But nowadays I hear one of you uttering such lies at least ten times a day."

The Question of Imamate

Inaction Versus Action

It was once brought to my attention that an acquaintance of mine was leading a campaign against the Imam (prayer leader) of his locality. According to him, *Salat* (liturgical prayer) could not be lead by that particular person because he was a heretic. He had tried his best, but he had not been able to oust the Imam from his post. This, however, had the effect of dividing the Muslims of that area into two separate groups. Peace and good relations had been destroyed and in their place now there was hatred, disagreement and violence. An action which was intended to be positive had produced a negative result.

When I met the gentleman in question, I asked him why he had raised this issue when it is clearly stated in a *hadith* that prayers may be offered under the leadership of anyone, be he good or bad. It also pointed out that the Imamate was conceived of as being for administrative purposes. What determines the efficacy of prayer is not the character of the person leading the prayers but the good intentions of the person saying the prayer. Whether a prayer is accepted or not depends entirely upon the virtues of the person saying it. It serves no useful purpose then to find fault with the Imam, because that is another issue altogether.

In reply to this he said, 'You are an Alim (religious scholar) and you are misdirecting me, by quoting the wrong *hadith*. The one you have quoted deals with prayer lead by a sinner. This is a different matter, because it concerns a heretic. And prayer lead by a heretic is not permitted. There is a *hadith* which says: Do not pray behind an innovator.'

I argued that understanding the true meaning of the Hadiths was not just a question of understanding the separate words of which they were made up. It was more important to understand the spirit of Islam with which they were imbued. I conceded that it was true that in the other tradition, prayer lead by a heretic was forbidden, but pointed out that rule held good only when there was a choice between a true follower of the Sunnah and an innovator. In his case, it was evident that there had been no other option. The only actual choice was between the heretic Imam on the one hand, and prolonged dissension on the other. Under such circumstances it was preferable to retain the services of this Imam in order to preserve Muslim unity.

It must be remembered that Islam is a result-oriented religion. The end result is firmly kept in mind until the very last. Only such steps are permissible in Islam as result in goodness, so that refraining from taking action is as important as taking the initiative, if the latter course would lead to undesirable situations.

How Do you Win a Nobel Prize?

Nobel Laureate Professor Abdus Salam toured several Indian cities in 1986, and in one of the speeches he made (*Times of India*, 16 January, 1986), he cited South Korea as an example of extraordinarily rapid national development. He said that about 15 years ago, the gross national product per capita there was equal to that of India, but that thanks to the efforts the Koreans had made, it was now many times more. Giving the example of the team who had come from South Korea to Trieste, in Italy, where he resides, to find out from him how Nobel Prizes were won, he said that a similar, spirit needed to be inculcated in the people of the Third world. He felt that it was this questing spirit which was the basis for all progress, be it of an individual or of a nation, and that this was true of progress both in this world and in the world hereafter.

All too often a process of stagnation sets in the affairs of a nation and it would appear that an impasse had been reached in developmental matters. Instead of progress there is decay. Instead of effort, there is inertia. When this stage is reached a nation begins to tumble in disarray down the ladder of progress towards the lowermost rung and it is only the seekers, the strivers who can pull it upwards from such an ignominious position and set it back on the path of progress. It is only the questing spirit which can put it right up on the topmost rung of the ladder of progress.

The Evils of Envy

Joseph (Yusuf), the Prophet, was cast into a well by his step-brother. He was saved, however, by the Almighty who blessed him with prophethood and caused him to reach a high position in Egypt. His step-brothers were at first unaware of his success. Later, when they realized what divine favour had been shown to Joseph, they exclaimed, 'By God, Allah has made you superior to us. 'This was how they expressed their acknowledgement of God's greatness.

Exactly the opposite happened in the case of the Bani Israel. The Bani Israel and the Bani Ismail were the descendants of two brothers. In early times, most of the Prophets were born into the Bani Israel. But the last of the Prophets, Muhammad, may peace be upon him, was born into the Bani Ismael. The Bani Israel turned against him, refusing to accept him as a Prophet. (Al Nisa, 54)

There are two quite different examples, one of acceptance, the other of rejection and envy. This, in fact, is the most difficult test in this world. And it will continue to be applied until Judgement Day, when God Himself will appear to make the reality known to all mankind. After that there will be nothing left to reject or to feel envious about.

The process of testing began at the time of Adam's creation, when God ordered the angels and Satan to bow before him (i.e. before Adam) The angels adopted the positive attitude of acknowledgement, but Satan was filled with envy, and chose to disobey God by rejecting Adam's superiority. The same happened in the case of Adam's two sons, Habil and Qabil. God accepted the sacrifice of Habil and rejected that of Qabil. Subsequently, Habil was humble and law-abiding, but Qabil turned envious and adopted the path of rejection, and became the loser. (Al-Maidah: 30)

Every man born into this world has to go through such a test. He faces situations of recognition and rejection in one way or another. Those who practise acceptance are the victorious ones, and those who favour rejection become the failures, the attitude of non-recognition being inconsistent with God's will. There can be no greater culprit than one who opposes God's decrees.

Patience: A Weapon

On September 6, 1980 a young woman by the name of Mrs. Kamlesh was walking along the road in Shahadara. Suddenly she was accosted by a man, who snatched her gold chain and made off with it. When the policeman on duty, Kishan Chand Tyagi, was informed of the theft, he immediately went in pursuit of the culprit to the Balmiki Mandir where, it was surmised, the chain snatcher had taken refuge. The moment the latter saw the policeman, he tried to escape, firing at his would-be captor with a revolver. His first bullet hit Kishan Chand just below the eye coming out from his neck. The wounded man shouted, "You got me once, but you can't hit me again!" not realizing that the thief had a revolver. The man (later identified as Ashok) fired at him again, but this time Kishan Chand was alert and dodged the bullet. Undaunted, he kept following Ashok although the latter was armed, and still firing at him while he himself was not even carrying a baton. Finally, he reached a dead-end with the policeman hot on the culprit's heels. The chase ended when Ashok was caught as he tried to scale the 4 1/2 foot wall.

Weren't you scared chasing an armed desperado?" a reporter asked Kishan Chand. "No," said the policeman. "I knew I would catch him when all his bullets were spent. The culprit had three bullets left, all of which he fired, rendering his revolver useless. That was when I caught him. (*The Hindustan Times*, September 7, 1980)

There is a big lesson in this small episode. It tells us how to face an enemy. Initially, we should render his onslaught ineffective by causing him to exhaust all of his "three bullets". Then it is much easier to deal with him. Suppose, for example, that someone much stronger than you becomes angry with you. When he begins his verbal assault, do not meet it head-on, but just tactfully side-step it. In other words, as the Americans say, 'Keep your cool' until his anger is spent. Now you can indulge in rational talk with him. If you can exercise so much patience, you will be the winner. Having made him expend all his "three bullets," you can face him with confidence.

Similarly, you will find that conspirators, who have come together to annihilate you; will remain united only so long as they perceive you as a standing threat. If you can remove that threat, possibly by removing yourself temporarily from the scene, their unity will fall apart, with the threat, as they perceive it, removed, they will have no excuse to rally under a common banner. The end result will be their dispersal, after which there is little harm that they can do.

The sight of an adversary provokes a man to attack. But, initially, he himself often becomes the victim. If, on the contrary, he acts with wisdom and exercises self-restraint, the first round will go in his favour, because he has avoided taking the brunt of the assault. Remember that the attacker does not have an unlimited stock of ammunition and it is soon spent. If you can manage to elude his "three bullets", the tide will turn in your favour and allow you to make a successful counter – attack. This applies to all enemies. It is just a question of not losing your head.

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Weighing up one's own actions before they are weighed up on the divine scales of justice

"Reckon with yourselves," 'Umar said, "before you are reckoned with in the next world; and weigh your own actions before they are weighed on the divine scales of justice; and prepare yourselves for the great appearance (before God)."

Hardness of heart comes from using religion for worldly ends

“The punishment of a learned man is for his heart to die,” said Hasan al-Basri. He was asked what was meant by the death of the heart, and he answered that it came from seeking the world by means of actions which should be gauged towards eternity. (Jami’ bayan al-’ilm wa fadhlihi)

God is in No Hurry

A Muslim went to see a Christian friend of his and found him pacing up and down. When he asked him why he looked so worried, his friend replied in all seriousness, "I am in a hurry, but God isn't!" Then he pointed to a dried-up mango tree in his garden and said, "I planted that tree with great expectations only a week ago, and now it is dead." "This tree is quite big, yet you say it was planted 'only a week ago.'" "That is the crux of the matter," replied his friend. "I wanted a tree overnight, so I brought a five-year old tree to plant instead of a sapling. I wanted to achieve in one day what it usually takes five years to do. And the result is before you. I had temporarily forgotten that there is a law of nature which regulates growth, and that it must be respected. If we ignore it, we shall only have dried-up trees in our gardens – no blossoms, and certainly no fruits."

Just think of how a boat is made. Without waiting for years for suitable trees to grow to maturity, the boatman would never have logs big enough from which to cut the plants to make his boat. Nature must run its course. The tree must grow to its full height. Only then can it provide the timber from which sturdy ships, fit for long voyages, can be made.

This fact is well-known, and acted upon at the level of the individual. But where the community is concerned, the impatient and the overambitious always want to set up its structures post haste, like the man who tried to transplant a fully-grown mango tree. The result is much the same as trying to go on an ocean voyage in a boat made of paper and string.

It must be remembered that this universe is the creation of God, and runs according to His rules. It is only if we stay in tune with His schemes that we can build up our lives. If we are out of tune, we shall achieve nothing.

Like a tree, life progresses in stages. If you want to build up your life, you must understand the law of gradation in nature and go along with it. There is no other way to success. All other paths lead to failure and destruction.

The Quran has repeatedly told us to exercise restraint. Restraint is not a state of inactivity, but properly planned action. The impatient man acts in a hurry, without thinking – more as a kind of reflex. On the other hand, a man with patience thinks dispassionately. He assesses himself and the enemy. He reviews the situation. He understands the law of nature, and then takes steps accordingly within its bounds.

One's emotions have to be kept strictly under control if one's thinking and planning are to be both moral and efficient. This is what the *Shariah* means by restraint. Others would call it acting according to plan. Any action carried out in a restrained manner will always have a better chance of success than one executed in haste, and without any due consideration of consequences;

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Death of the soul comes from seeking worldly gain from religion

Imam Hasan Basri the famous eighth century religious scholar, said: "A learned man is punished when his heart dies:" asked how his heart died, he replied, "By seeking the world through actions which should be directed towards the hereafter."

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One who will be saved from Doom on the Day of Judgement

“On the *Day* of Resurrection, God will save from Hell-fire one who has saved his brother from humiliation in this world;” these words were spoken by the Prophet Mohammad.

How I Became Interested in Islam

I trace the beginning of my interest in Islam when as a child of ten, while attending a reform Jewish Sunday School; I became fascinated in the historical relationship between the Jews and the Arabs. From my Jewish textbooks I learned Abraham was the father of the Arabs as well as the Jews. In these same books I read how centuries later when in medieval Europe, Christian persecution made their lives intolerable, the Jews were welcomed in Muslim Spain, and that it was this same Arabic-Islamic civilization which stimulated Hebrew culture to reach its highest peak of achievement. At that time, completely unaware of the true nature of Zionism, I naively thought the Jews were returning to Palestine to strengthen their close ties of kinship in religion and culture with their Semitic cousins. Together, I believed, the Jews and the Arabs would co-operate and achieve another Golden Age of culture in the Middle East.

Despite my fascination with the study of Jewish history, I was extremely unhappy at the Sunday School. At this time I identified myself strongly with the Jewish people and their horrible fate under the Nazis and I was shocked and pained that none of my fellow classmates took their religion seriously. For instance, during religious services at the synagogue the children would read comic strips hidden in their prayer books and make fun of the rituals. The children were so noisy and disorderly that the teachers found it almost impossible to conduct the classes. Meanwhile I delved into the stories of Jesus in the New Testament and was puzzled why so great a prophet who led such a beautiful and noble life had been rejected by his own people. Perhaps my classmates' complete lack of respect for their teachers was justified. I found them narrow-minded and bigoted, emphasizing their hatred and fear of Christians far more than their love for Judaism.

At home the atmosphere for religious observance was scarcely more congenial. On the Jewish High Holy Days instead of attending synagogue I felt it blasphemous that my sister and I were taken out of school to go out on picnics and parties. When I told my parents how miserable I was at the reform Jewish Sunday School, they joined an agnostic humanistic organization known as the Ethical Culture Movement.

The Ethical Culture Movement was founded in the late 19th century by Felix Adler. While studying for the rabbinate, Felix Adler became convinced that devotion to ethical values as relative and man-made regarding any supernaturalism or theology as irrelevant, constituted the only religion fit for the modern world. I attended the Ethical Culture School for five years. Here I grew into complete accord with the ideas of the movement and looked upon all traditional organized religions with scorn.

Throughout my adolescence I remained under the influence of humanistic philosophy until after graduation from secondary school, when I chose to study at the university a course entitled "Judaism in Islam." My professor was a Rabbi who tried to convince his students – all Jews – that Islam was derived

from Judaism. Our textbook took each verse from the Qur'an, painstakingly tracing it to its allegedly Jewish sources. His lectures were liberally illustrated with films and coloured slides in praise of Zionism and the State of Israel. Although his real aim was to prove to his students the superiority of Judaism over Islam, he convinced me of just the opposite. As I plunged deeper and deeper into the study of Old Testament and the Qur'an, the contrast between the two scriptures became increasingly evident. In a sense the Old Testament could almost be considered a history of the Jews as God's special chosen people. Although the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic to an Arab Prophet, its message is a universal one directed to the entire human race.

When my professor explained that the divine right of the Jews to Palestine has always been a central theme of Judaism, I was instantly repelled by such a narrow-minded conception of God. Does not the Qur'an say that "to God belongs the East and the West; Wherever ye turn there is His face?" Did not the Prophet Muhammad say that the whole earth is a mosque? Zionism preaches that only in Palestine can the Jew feel at home and elsewhere he is living in exile. The claim of my professor that only in Palestine could the Jews make their contribution to human civilization seemed baseless when I pondered over the fact that Moses received his revelation in Egypt, the most important parts of the *Talmud* were written in what is now Iraq, and some of the most beautiful Hebrew poetry was composed in Muslim Spain. The rigid exclusiveness of Judaism I felt had a great deal of connection with the persecutions the Jews have suffered throughout their history. Perhaps this would never have happened if the Jews had competed vigorously with the other faiths for converts. Zionism is a combination of the racist tribalistic aspects of Judaism with modern secular nationalism. Zionism was further discredited in my eyes when I discovered that Israeli leaders such as David Ben-Gurion are not observant Jews and that perhaps nowhere in the world is orthodox Judaism regarded with such contempt as in Israel! The Zionists have made the worst aspects of Western materialistic philosophy their very own. Only a complete rejection of all moral and spiritual values could account for such a systematic uprooting of an entire people from their homeland and an utter disregard of any sense of justice. When I found that nearly all important Jewish leaders supported Zionism and felt not the slightest twinge of conscience for the terrible wrong inflicted on the Arabs, I could no longer consider myself a Jew at heart.

At the same time my professor convinced me that ethical values had a divine origin and were the absolute eternal truth. I could not understand how people like my parents could cherish moral and spiritual values and then consider their theological foundations irrelevant. If morals were purely man-made, they could be changed at will according to whim, convenience or circumstance. Belief in the hereafter I came to feel as essential not merely because it was comforting. If ethical and spiritual values are of divine origin, we are directly responsible to God for developing our highest potentialities. Each one of us will be called upon to render an account of our life on earth and be rewarded or punished accordingly. Therefore one who has a firm faith in the hereafter is willing to sacrifice transitory pleasures and endure hardships to attain lasting good.

As I studied the beliefs of all the major faiths, I came to the conclusion that originally all the great religions were one, but as time passed they became corrupted. Idol worship, the idea of reincarnation, and the caste system began to permeate Hinduism, passivity became characteristic of Buddhism, ancestor worship of Confucianism, the doctrine of original sin, the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus resulting in an anthropomorphic conception of God and the atonement by the death on the cross, of Christianity and the exclusive chosen people idea of Judaism. All these ideas which so repelled me were not to be found in Islam. Increasingly I began to feel that Islam was the original religion that alone had retained its purity. Other religions were only partially true. Only Islam contained the whole truth. Above all, Islam provided its adherents with a complete, comprehensive way of life in which the relation to the spiritual were balanced into a perfect harmony.

Although I wanted to become a Muslim, my family managed to argue me out of it. I was warned that Islam would complicate my life since the faith is not part of the American scene. I was told that Islam would alienate me from my family and isolate me from the community. At that time my faith was not sufficiently strong to withstand these pressures. I became so ill that I had to discontinue college. For a long time I remained at home under private medical care, steadily growing worse. In desperation my parents had me confined to a hospital, where I stayed for more than two years. While in the hospital I vowed that if I recovered I would become a Muslim.

After I was finally allowed to go home, discharged, I investigated all the opportunities for meeting Muslims in New York City and making friendships, and it was my pleasure to make the acquaintance of some of the finest people that anyone could ever hope to meet. I also began to write articles for Muslim magazines and to carry on an extensive correspondence with Muslim leaders all over the world.

As Ramadan approached my desire to embrace Islam grew so strong that I began to practise the five daily prayers, and am now undertaking the fast for the first time. I am doing this with a firm belief that nothing but good can result in living according to my deepest convictions.

Islam Versus the West by Maryam Jameelah

Principle, Not Cowardice

A reader of *Al-Risala* once complained that there was one thing about it that he did not like. "You always preach tolerance among the Muslims. This is just cowardice. Is it your intention to turn all Muslims into cowards?"

The complainant is a small shopkeeper who sells goods which meet the daily needs of his customers. One day I was at his shop when a young boy came in with a matchbox in his hand. He threw the matchbox towards the shopkeeper, saying angrily. "There are supposed to be 60 matchsticks in this, but there are only 50!"

The boy's behaviour had been insulting and provocative but the shopkeeper did not react. He quietly handed over another match box to him, saying very politely, "Never mind, take another one."

After the boy had left, I said to the shopkeeper, "That boy definitely misbehaved, but you didn't say anything." He replied, "Earlier, I used to talk back and often clash with the customers. The net result was that my shop closed down. Later, I kept watching another shopkeeper who was doing good business. He ignored their curt remarks and dealt with them pleasantly. I started doing the same thing when I opened up another shop. Now, by the grace of God, my shop is running well-certainly much better than before."

I heard him out patiently and then I said to him, "Between you and me there is only one difference. You have become 'coward' for the sake of your worldly business, while I would like to become a 'coward' for the sake of the Hereafter. There is, in fact, no cowardice in this. It is a matter of moral principle. Neither is it passivity. It is a matter of positive action. It is not conceding a defeat but taking a step towards a greater victory. It leads not to loss but to gain. It is not bowing to man, but to the Lord of the Universe.

If one does not understand the importance of patience and tolerance, it can only be because of a lack of experience and any innate sense of discretion.

The Difficulties of Recognition

Towards the end of the Meccan period in the Prophet's life, an incident took place which is of considerable relevance even today. It concerned the acceptance or the rejection of the Prophet by the chiefs of the Quraysh. Having gathered together in Mecca, they decided after consulting amongst themselves that Muhammad should be called before them and that certain demands should be made of him. If he fulfilled these demands, he would be accepted as a prophet, but if he failed to oblige, this could be used as a pretext for rejecting him. Muhammad, may peace be upon him, was duly summoned. One of "the demands that was made was (Ask your Lord) to resurrect our forefathers. And among the resurrected should be Qussayy ibn Kalab, because he was pious and honest. We will ask him about what you tell us – whether it is true or false."

Here the question arises as to why it was that when the Messenger of God was most pious and most honest, people were loth to concede that he possessed these virtues, preferring to give the benefit of the doubt to Qussayy ibn Kalab. The reason for this was that with the passage of time, the reputation of the long-dead Qusayy ibn Kalab had become established. The Prophet, on the other hand, was a contemporary personality whose piety, honesty and nobility had yet to be historically popularized and acknowledged. For many, his qualities were but a latent potential.

The non-believers could accept what history told them, but they were not, on their own, capable of recognizing a prophet. The believers, however, recognising his inner qualities, acknowledged him as their Prophet.

Those who can recognise a prophet only after history has certified him to be so are little better than blind men.

No Identity Card

A village boy once came to a city where by chance he walked past a school on its celebration day. He saw hundreds of boys queuing up in front of a window and, when he drew closer, he found that sweets were being distributed at a counter. As the boys collected their share of sweets, they came happily away, one by one, to stand in groups with their school friends. The village boy watched all this for some time, and then he too joined the queue and started moving ahead/with it. He was under the impression that when his turn came, he would likewise be handed a packet of sweets. When he reached the window, he stretched out his hand in eager anticipation. But a voice from the other side of the counter said abruptly, 'Your identity card, please'. Of course, not possessing any such card, he failed to produce it, and was asked to step out of the line. Only then did the boy realize that the sweets were meant solely for pupils who had studied in the school for at least a full academic year and were not for just any child who appeared out of the blue and managed somehow or the other to present himself at the counter.

Something very similar to this is going to take place in the hereafter, when all the people will be gathered together before God on the Day of Judgement – the day when God will give His verdict and everyone will receive his just deserts. Awards will certainly be made, but only to those who can produce identity cards, i.e. to those who have worked hard for this day, and can show that they are deserving candidates.

That day will come when the most glorious sight for the human being will be the countenance of his Maker, when the most delightful experience will be the touch of the Almighty, when the most prestigious act will be self-prostration before the Lord of all worlds. But all this will become a reality only for those who have made due preparation for this day, and who have thus earned God's blessings. For many, their own ignorant, wayward behaviour will come between God and themselves. Even standing on the threshold of God's world, they will fail to catch so much as a glimpse of the Almighty. They will find themselves among the deprived on the day when divine blessings are being showered upon all true devotees of our Creator.

Gulf Diary

4

13th February, 1991

The *Nawa-e-Waqt* (February 13) has published an article by Mr. Malik Amjad Husain, an advocate, in which he says that surcharged emotions have taken control of the public in Pakistan. They are losing sight of reality and are no longer capable of determining who is in the wrong. They consider Mr. Saddam Hussain a hero because he has revived the Palestinian issue. They circumvent the present issue by arguing that Kuwait was a part of Iraq and that it was the British who in 1918 carved out a state and gave it sovereignty.

The writer argues that even if we accept that the British created Kuwait for their own selfish motives, it is not prudent to keep harping on this point. In the same way, even Pakistan was a part of India 44 years ago, and the Indians can take the stand that since India was divided to serve British interests, it would be legitimate for India to usurp Pakistan. It is not correct even to entertain such notions.

This shows the double standards which have been accepted and to which Muslims have fallen prey. The logic which they put forward to justify the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq should be equally applicable to India or Israel who, by the same token, should be in occupation respectively of Pakistan and Palestine.

*In his article (An Arabic magazine published by Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow.) 'Who is Responsible for the Gulf war?' (*Ai-Raid*, February 1, 1991), Mohammad Wajdi Qandeel elaborates on the losses of war. He asks who was responsible for stoking the fires of war, thus opening the gates of hell for Iraq. He emphasises that the person responsible is Saddam Hussain. It is the Iraqi leadership which is responsible for the horrific tragedy which has befallen Iraq (p. 2).

This analysis is strictly in accordance with Islamic thinking. Islam takes cognisance of the cause and not the result. The responsibility will attach to the man who was the cause behind such a tragic occurrence.

It is not Islamic to apply logic of one sort in one place and of a different sort in another; or to be supportive of a cause in one place while changing one's stand in another, where both situations, in essence, are on a parallel.

14th February, 1991

The Arabic weekly, *Al-Majalla*, (13-19 February) has published an interview with the one-time personal physician of Saddam Hussain, Dr. Tehsin Moalla, who received his medical degrees at the University of Baghdad.

In the interview he dwelt upon the destruction of Iraq which has resulted from the war. He said that the people of Iraq are suffering the worst misery, such as is painful even for an observer. He does not hold Allied forces responsible for this suffering, but places the blame squarely on the Iraqi leadership. He goes on to say that Iraq is now paying for the crime committed by Saddam Hussain.

A similar note has been struck by the political commentator of *Al-Dawah* (February 14), an Arabic weekly published in Riyadh. He says that the war has caused the Palestinians to suffer irreparable losses for they are now shunned by the other Arab nations who had given them billions of dollars in aid and had placed them in high positions. No longer can they enjoy these benefits.

The loss they have sustained is not the fault of other Arab countries, nor is it attributable to anything other than the course adopted by their own leaders. The Palestinians are now paying a heavy price for the stand taken by their leaders in justifying Saddam Hussain's invasion of Kuwait.

The crux of the matter pertains not just to Iraq or to Kuwait, but rather to the whole world. Everywhere, including India, Muslims are faced with problems. Those responsible for this are not the supposed enemies of Islam, but the Muslims' very own leaders. Without exception, these leaders have misled their followers. They have played upon their emotions, thus bringing themselves into prominence, but causing greater and greater misery for the Muslim masses.

15th February, 1991

Aaen, a monthly published in Lahore, arrived today. It represents the ideology of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Pakistan. It reports that at a meeting of the executive committee of the Jamaat-e-Islami on January 26 in Lahore, a resolution on the Gulf crisis was unanimously passed.

It was declared that since this war is being fought by America by political design and with imperialistic goals in view, it must cease forthwith. It is the earnest appeal of Muslims the world over, and of all peace-loving peoples, that the Americans, their Allies and Iraq must give up the path of confrontation and respond to the call of peace.

This appeal on the part of the Jamaat-e-Islami sounds hollow and unrealistic. If the Americans and the Allies are acting belligerently in their own self-interest, they will never pay any heed to such appeals. No one ever does when it is a question of self-interest. I suspect that even those who are making this appeal would not act any differently under the circumstances.

An example of this can be found in Pakistan itself. General Zia, the former President of Pakistan, was instrumental in having Mr. Bhutto sentenced to death. In this, he had the whole-hearted support of Syed Abul Ala Maududi and the Jamaat-e-Islami. When the death sentence for Mr. Bhutto was announced, all the countries of the world, including the Muslim countries, appealed to the Pakistani President not to hang Mr. Bhutto. But General Zia and the Jamaat-e-Islami went ahead with the execution of Mr. Bhutto in total disregard of this worldwide appeal for mercy. They knew that Bhutto alive would have meant their political demise.

Today, wherever self-interest is involved, people are not willing to listen. Then how can such people advise others to disregard their own interests and pay heed to appeals to retract their steps? Principles are for others. For ourselves we want gain. So goes the popular refrain. What the British writer, W.S. Leander (1778-1864) had to say on this subject applies perfectly to such people: "We talk on principle, but we act interest."

16th February, 1991

Al-Majallah (13-19 February) carries a photograph of an agitating crowd made up of Iraqi residents in the U.S. Among the various placards they are carrying, there is one that reads: 'Iraqi immigrants are not responsible for Saddam's crime.'

It is reported that there are about 3 million Arabs in the USA, out of which 80,000 are from Iraq. Their second generation has no particular attachment with their place of origin-but the generation which was born in the Arabian peninsula is deeply attached to their place of birth. One Arab American said: "Today, I am witnessing the country of my birth and the country of my adoption fighting with each other. I am witnessing the homeland of my sons and grandsons at war with the native place of my forefathers."

There are Arabs and other Muslims who have settled in France, Britain, Germany, etc. in large numbers. Everywhere, they are in a state of psychological conflict, because their activities in America and other western countries are now suspect. And judging by the many cases of violence against them, the local population is not particularly fond of them.

It appears that Muslims the world over are going to face a situation similar to that of the Muslims in India since 1947. Where Muslims in western countries had been leading a life of dignity and prosperity, they will now be forced into a life full of difficulties and humiliation. They lay the blame for this on the supposed 'anti-Islamic' sentiment of the west. But, in fact, the responsibility lies with the Muslim leaders and with no one else. In the distant past, Muslims carried with them to other countries the invitation to Islam. And this solved their problems. But, nowadays, Muslims go to other countries solely in search of a livelihood. And there they find themselves beset by all kinds of problems.

17th February, 1991

The title of the *Times of India* editorial (January 18, 1991) was 'Pax Americana', referring, of course, to the dominant role of the USA after the second world war. ('Pax Americana' is an echo of the expression 'Pax Romana' which signified the kind of peace which was politically established by the Romans after they had spread their empire in the Mediterranean region). The concept of 'Pax Americana' was only partially true, because during this period, the Soviet Union also enjoyed the status of a superpower. Now, however, the situation has undergone a radical change. *The Times of India* aptly observes that "the bi-polar world order created by the Cold War collapsed along with the Berlin Wall in November 1989."

A more and more uni-polar world began to emerge from the rubble. That process has now accelerated with dizzying speed.” (p.1)

Times of India of the 17th February has published an interview with the famous French historian, Amaury de Riencourt, who says that centuries of historic endeavour and extraordinary material progress by the US has set it on the course which will lead it to Pax Americana.

Evidently, it is America’s imperial destiny to be the Rome of the twentieth century. This is an indisputable fact. Wisdom for the Muslims, therefore, lies in steering clear of any collision course with the Americans on the political front, and approaching them instead with the message of Islam. If things are done in this way, it may just be possible at some future date to replace American influence with Islam. No power can totally deny the opportunity to propagate Islam. And if such an opportunity exists, that is all that Islam needs.

18th February, 1991

A piece of wishful thinking is expressed in a news item in the *Hindustan Times* of February 18 under the heading: “India Wants a Role in Post War Plan.” This reports that acting on instructions from New Delhi, the Indian Ambassador to the US, Mr. Abid Hussain, met with the US secretary of State for political affairs, in order to convey India’s desire to be included in any post-war reconstruction and recovery programme in the region. He said that when the reconstruction and rehabilitation programme begins, India should be included as a partner in this process. Mr. Abid Hussain went on to say that “a country like India has to play an extremely important role in the subcontinent, and the US must take much more interest in India’s development.” (p. 12)

Under the present circumstances this would appear to be an immature request that will never be acceded to. The front page of the same newspaper carries a report on the stoppage of the refueling facility provided to American Air Force transport aeroplanes after the hue and cry raised against it by the politicians. If India is not willing to co-operate even to the extent of providing oil on a cost basis, how can she expect to be rewarded in future reconstruction work?

It is an accepted fact that those who are willing to take risks will be the ones to merit success. What right have we to expect to enjoy the fruits of the risks taken by others? Only a simpleton could indulge in such wishful thinking.

19th February, 1991

According to a report in *The Times of India*, the following joke is doing the rounds in a hotel in Bahrain: ‘A Patriot a day keeps the Scuds away’.

Scuds, lethal, long range missiles manufactured by the Soviet Union, were purchased in large quantities and stockpiled by Iraq. In the whole region there was nothing with which to counter them. Thus armed,

Iraq should have been able to play havoc with Saudi Arabia and other Muslim states. In fact, a sizeable number of these missiles were targeted at Dahrn and Riyadh. But, thanks to their being regularly destroyed in mid-air by the Patriot missiles, they remained largely ineffective.

When the Scud was first produced, the Americans were able to gather sufficient intelligence about it to be able to set up the research work which brought the Patriot on the scene. Although the Scud travels six times faster than the speed of sound, its launching is instantly detected by the Patriot system, which thereupon launches a missile from the opposite direction. This intercepts the Scud and destroys it before it reaches its target.

It is not plots and conspiracies which have brought the US presence to the Gulf, but American competence in producing and utilizing the latest technology. The Arabs had nothing with which to combat the Scuds. They had, therefore, no option but to invite the Americans on to Arab soil. Quoting the *Washington Post*, the *Times of India*, reports that eight Arab States (Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Amman, Qatar, UAE) are already planning to raise 15 billion dollars to have American land and air forces on their horizons, which will deter any other political misadventure. The real weakness of the Muslims is their lack of re-sources. Unless this is remedied, there is no point in their agitating against the anti-Islamic conspiracy. This only encourages peevishness and anger in the discussion of Muslim problems without doing anything to solve them.

20th February, 1991

On the 2nd of February, 1991, *Al-Majallah* titled its cover story, 'Kuwait Liberation Operation—the Final Phase. On the 7th of February, *Al-Dawah*, an Arabic weekly published in Riyadh, followed with 'the End is Near! Time magazine of the 25th February (arriving as usual ahead of schedule) capped this with 'The Beginning of the End'.

Two thirds of the Iraqi army has been destroyed by non-stop bombing by the Allied forces. The most important places and cities in Iraq look like ruins. Saddam Hussain, who never talked of stopping before the final victory, is now appealing for a ceasefire. The unilateral 'beginning of the end' of this horrific war has started. In this issue of *Time Magazine*, there are moving scenes of the effects of the war on Iraq. There is a photograph of a woman sitting on rubble which was once her home, holding her head in her hands. In another photograph, the Iraqi dead are being dumped unceremoniously into a truck. In yet another photograph, there are two women sitting crying in the midst of ruins. Another picture of ruins shows an Iraqi man in a state of despair. Bridges have been blown up, buildings razed. The fact is that Iraq's destruction is far more extensive even than that perpetrated by the Tartars in the year 1258.

On the 13th of October, 1990, communalist Hindus broke through a wall, entered the Babari Masjid and unfurled a saffron flag on one of its domes. There were widespread disturbances in the country. Around the same time, anti-Islamic, American forces arrived in the Gulf. Throughout the whole country **Qunur-e-Nazila* (A special prayer said for the destruction of the enemies of Islam.) was being offered.

The Muslims started cursing openly in their mosques and at other gatherings. But, January, 17, 1991, brought the destruction, not of the infidels, but of the Muslims. It is high time the Muslims stopped agitating against others, did some soul searching and reconsidered their entire line of thinking.

21st February, 1991

Over five lakh troops belonging to 28 different countries have assembled in the Gulf at the invitation of Saudi King Fahd and the Amir of Kuwait, Al-Saban. They are now engaged in a destructive war with Saddam Hussain, whose supporters are enraged at the very idea. The Muslim papers in India print such headlines as 'Islam on the threshold of Christianity', 'Rulers of Arab States Admit Infidels to Holy Land,' etc.

The Saudis have a different point of view. Shaikh Ibn Baz has issued a *fatwa* in Riyadh's Arabic weekly, *Al-Dawah*, (February 21, pp. 6-7) in which he states that it is not a deviation from the *shariah* for Muslim rulers to take help from non-Muslim States when they are in need of assistance. *Al-Dawah* has published another report by Shaikh Ibn Baz in which he makes it clear that it is legal to take help from non-Muslims in order to expel tyrants, to eliminate them and to save the Islamic community from their mischief whenever that should prove necessary. For such purposes, help can be taken from non-Muslims, whether they be Jews, Christians or infidels.

On principle, such a stand is correct. Even the Messenger of God sought help from Abu Talib, Mutim bin Addi, Abdullah bin Urayqit, etc., when they were all non-Muslims. The example given by Shaikh ibn Baz was also cited by the Indian Ulama when they included non-Muslims in their movement prior to 1947. The outcome, of course, was the reverse in the latter case. When the Prophet took the help of non-Muslims, the result was the dominance of Islam, whereas when the Indian Ulama sought non-Muslim assistance during the freedom struggle, they suffered a defeat.

There is no doubt that in this war, too, it is Israel and other western countries that will stand to gain in large measure. The Bigger loser will be Iraq and, in differing degrees the Muslims of the world. Who benefits from this help will depend upon who had prepared the ground before seeking help. The Muslims in the first phase of Islam stood on foundations they themselves had solidly laid, so 'that whatever gains there were indisputably fell to their lot. The Muslims of today have no such base of their own, with the result that they can never hope to enjoy the fruits of victory.

22nd February, 1991

The Allied Forces under the command of the Americans started their bombing raids over Iraq on January 17. They have almost completely destroyed the military might and economic power of Iraq. The ground attack has now been launched and is expected to last only a few days. There has been fierce fighting in which the Iraqis are being massacred by the Allied Forces. Iraq will have no option but to surrender in a most humiliating manner.

According to a report, the Iraqi Ambassador in Pakistan maintains that the Gulf war has proved that Soviet Russia has lost its power base, and is no longer a superpower. He has complained of Russia's inability to have a UN resolution passed in the Iraqis' favour. Iraq had always considered the USSR to be a dependable friend, but it had ultimately done nothing for Iraq.

Instead of complaining of the bankruptcy of the Soviet leadership, the Iraqi Ambassador should blame the leaders of Iraq. Soviet Russia and the US signed a treaty in June 90 to end the cold war, but the Iraqi leaders failed to understand its significance. Subsequently, they invaded Kuwait and occupied it in August, 1990, no doubt feeling certain that the Russians would support them as they had done on previous occasions, i.e. before the end of the cold war. But the Russians did little to help Iraq. The reason is that the ending of the cold war did not mean that the USA and the USSR were now on an equal footing. It was rather an acknowledgement that the Russians had lost their superpower status. But the Iraqis, thanks to their wishful thinking, failed to get the message.

The leaders of Iraq are depending upon the successful outcome of the ground battle, which they call the 'real battle.' Before the battle started, they claimed that they would turn the desert into a graveyard for the Americans. This reveals the depths of their ignorance. Nowadays, the truly decisive battle is fought in the air, and this the Americans have already won. Now the ground battle will be just a mopping up operation and not the start of the real war. For the Iraqis, however, it is easier to live in an ivory tower at wishful thinking. There is just one problem. When the ruthless hand of reality strikes, nothing will be left of it, not even the smallest atom of rubble.

Let Not the Scourge of God be Visited upon us

Those who keep dairy cows are faced with the perennial problem of preventing the calves from drinking up all their mothers' milk. This problem is often solved by tying a thorny piece of wood to the calves' heads, so that when they go to drink milk, the thorns prick the udders, causing the cows to shy away.

This 'thorny' approach is reminiscent of the way present-day Muslims behave when they attempt to communicate the divine message with which they have been entrusted to other nations of the world. Although duty-bound to convey the message of Islam to others, they have chosen instead to pick political and economic quarrels with those to whom they should be bringing the word of God. They have simply become worldly rivals of other nations instead of being their religious guides and mentors. Their politics of confrontation are like thorns on the face of the Muslim community which drive non-Muslims away before they can drink the God-given milk of Islam.

If we truly believe in the advent of the Last Day, when people will be called to account for their actions, we must do our utmost to shed these 'thorns'. If we fail to do so, there is a real danger of incurring the wrath of God and having to suffer punishment for the sins of others as well as for our own. We must at all times create an atmosphere which fosters receptivity to the message of Islam and encourages others to see it in its true perspective.